

Gun

by Susanne Barringer

Category: X-Files

Genre: Angst

Language: English

Status: In-Progress

Published: 1999-04-21 09:00:00

Updated: 1999-04-21 09:00:00

Packaged: 2016-04-27 12:00:58

Rating: T

Chapters: 1

Words: 5,493

Publisher: www.fanfiction.net

Summary: Scully's mistake leads her to doubt her instinct & question her working relationship with Mulder.

Gun

TITLE: Gun

> AUTHOR: Susanne Barringer
 EMAIL: sbarringer@usa.net

> ARCHIVE: Already sent to Gossamer. Feel free to archive anywhere else as long as these headers stay attached.
 CATEGORY: SA

> KEYWORDS: MulderScully UST? I think of this as UST, but then again, I think everything's UST. In any case, I don't think there's anything here that would be terribly traumatizing for NoRomos.

> RATING: PG-13 (some violence and language)
 SPOILERS: One

Breath, Anasazi/Blessing Way

> SUMMARY: Scully's mistake leads her to question her working relationship with Mulder.
 DISCLAIMER: Borrowing these characters from Chris Carter, 1013, and Fox. No money is being made, etc.

> <p> <p>

Gun by Susanne Barringer

GUN!

A simple word, easy to pronounce, its meaning clear and concise--it can mean little else. From the first day at the Academy, it is drilled into our heads. GUN!

When in pursuit of a perpetrator, during a manhunt, while carrying out an arrest, if you see the suspect pull a gun, you yell GUN! What could be simpler?

It a safety mechanism, a dark warning to save lives. It is a necessary call, one so ingrained in the agent's head that it becomes habit to both look for the gun and be prepared to announce it. It is

exercised over and over and over in drills, practice sessions, and hypothetical scenarios, until it becomes natural.

It is the easiest thing in the world to remember for a trained agent. Effortless. It grows to be second nature, as routine as the actual pulling of your own gun. GUN!

I see the man remove a gun from an old chest. I see the glint of metal in the dim light of the warehouse. I see him turn, strike a stance and aim. I see it all as if it is in slow motion. My weapon weighs heavily in my hand. Another agent is entering the room just behind the suspect. I don't have a clear shot. I think GUN! I yell GUN! I swear I hear the word GUN echo through the empty warehouse in my own voice. GUN!

But I don't actually say it. I open my mouth but the word gets trapped in a whisper as I realize that the suspect is aiming at something behind me, at the agent who followed me into the room.

In the end, I don't say the word aloud, although I think it in a brilliant clarity that explodes inside my head. The gun goes off, I feel the bullet hit someone behind me, I hear a body fall to the floor. The echo of the shot vibrates inside my chest. I stand motionless.

I watch as the suspect aims again, this time at me. A second shot is fired from somewhere on my left. I see the suspect hit in the chest. I watch as his body is driven back with the force of the bullet until he slumps to the ground.

I cannot turn around. I know what I will see and I refuse to see it. "Agent Scully!" calls a voice from off to the left, from where the second shot came. "Agent Scully, are you okay?" this time closer. Then, "Agent down!" yells the voice at a higher volume. "AGENT DOWN! CALL AN AMBULANCE!" I hear the panic. I know I do not want to look to see what is causing it.

I will not turn around. To turn around will be to admit its truth. I stare at the suspect lying on the ground several yards in front of me. I see the puddle of blood growing around him. He is dead. I can tell. I do not turn around. "Agent Scully, I need your help here!" The voice comes from down low behind me, down on the ground, no doubt stooping next to the thing that I cannot bring myself to acknowledge.

I do not want to turn and look. I know that I will see spilled blood, and I hope against hope that it will be his leg or his shoulder that is bleeding, that it won't be his chest or his head that is surfaced with the red gleam. I pray most of all that it is not a growing puddle of blood like I see around the body in front of me.

I finally turn around. To know that it is not a nightmare I realize I must face it. I see two agents huddled over my worst fear. I force myself to look down, to look at where they are looking. It is not a small stain of blood. It is blood everywhere. It covers the entire right side of his body, from his neck to his waist. It is spattered in small glistening droplets across his face, his hair, the floor around him, like glitter. It covers the hands of the agents attending

to him. Oh my God, there is blood everywhere. He is drowning in it. Puddles of blood. Drowning him. Drowning me.

"GUN!" I hear myself scream. "GUN!" My throat aches from the volume at which I yell, but nobody seems to be listening. "GUNNNN!" Strong arms from out of the duskiness drag me away from the bloody scene while my voice continues to echo through the dark warehouse. "GUUUNN! GUUUNNNNNN!"

He survives, but just barely. Shot under the arm, in the small area not covered by the bullet-proof vest. The hollow-point bullet slips into him as if he were marshmallow, shredding everything in its wake. It will take hours of surgery and nerve-wracking waiting. Meanwhile, I must answer the accusing glances of a million people. "What happened?" ask all the voices that speak to me in soft hospital tones touched with clouds of sympathy. I know perfectly well what happened, but I refuse to discuss it. I refuse to face my mother, Skinner, the investigating agents, anyone. I especially refuse to face Kersh, who lurks darkly in the hallway like Death himself.

I know what happened. We were pursuing a suspect. He was unarmed and had no history of violence. We had backup of at least a half a dozen agents. My partner followed me into the large shipping room of the warehouse, covering my back. The suspect picked up a weapon he had hidden on the premises. He aimed it at my partner.

He aimed his gun at my partner and I froze. I froze in a panic of terror unlike anything I have ever felt before. If he had aimed at me, I would not have felt the absolute fear that I did. But he aimed at my partner, and I was unable to respond, unable to warn him that the suspect had a gun.

I did not follow procedure. I did not follow basic law enforcement technique that even the most rookie cop can practice as naturally as breathing. I panicked and now my partner is dying on an operating table as cold and sterile as the emptiness of my soul.

Mulder is dying because of my weakness, and I will never ever forgive myself.

Mulder isn't in surgery more than an hour before Skinner has my resignation, scrawled in nervous handwriting on the back of an admission form I took from the desk of the emergency room. I have no other choice. I froze and now my partner is fighting for his life.

"Will you give this to A.D. Kersh? I can't see him right now."

Skinner takes the resignation, reads it, then pulls me aside and puts his hands on my shoulders in some sort of lame attempt at consoling me for having almost killed my partner. His usual harsh tone falls to a whisper as if to make me feel that he will not spill my secret. "There's no such thing as a perfect agent, Scully. We're human. We make mistakes. What happened to you could happen to anyone."

The words are nice but they are bullshit. Agents who make the kind of mistake I made do not stay with the Bureau long. Agents who get their partner killed due to their own negligence have trouble finding a new partner. No one deserves a weak partner, especially not Mulder. GUN! How hard it is? How hard is it to shout out a single word to warn your partner so that he doesn't get hit by a bullet that he didn't see because HE was properly doing his job of covering your back? That bullet should have been for me. I was in front. It was my job to cover the front.

Skinner holds the paper out toward me. I shove his hand away. "Take it," I spit out, the sharp edges of my voice bouncing off the crisp whiteness of the long hospital corridor. GUN!

I walk away from Skinner without another word. He folds up my resignation and puts it in his pocket, but I can tell by the look on his face that he is not finished with me, that as soon as we get the word that Mulder is okay Skinner will be pressuring me to reconsider.

News comes from the operating room, heralded by stone-faced nurses who, knowing my medical background, serenade me with hollow medical terminology and scientific mumbo-jumbo. I wish they would tell me in the carefully chosen words and cautious optimism usually bestowed upon the regular person. The horror of knowing what is happening to Mulder only magnifies my nightmare. I can picture exactly what is going on in that operating room, an anonymous place that seems so distant from my vigil in this waiting room, as if in another lifetime. Mulder's chest is cracked wide open, his precious heart resting in a surgeon's hands. It pumps in a beat that sings of life and love and immortality, but the holes and wounds hum a different tune. It stops beating. The surgeon's hands must massage it back to life in a caress of the heart and soul that saves both his life and my own. Mulder stands just one missed heartbeat away from mortality, away from being gone forever in a way that I cannot comprehend. His absence in this life is as unimaginable as the things he tries to convince me to believe. I do not want to believe.

There is nothing for me to do but sit and wait, so I take a seat and wait. I choose a corner chair and sit staring at the wall in front of me--hospital white with a cheaply framed picture of pink roses in a yellow vase. I wonder what kind of person designs hospital waiting rooms. Who decides what pictures to place on the wall that people will be staring at for endless hours upon hours as their loved ones suffer and breathe and live and die?

There is nothing to do but look at the picture. If I close my eyes, I see only red blood. The sound of the gun going off echoes through my head continually. GUN! I think the word to myself over and over as some sort of invocation. I use it to stay calm, to keep from exploding into a million tiny pieces that would scatter through the waiting room like snow, covering everyone and everything in a cold, soft blanket. I already feel so cold, frozen solid so that my heart pounds maniacally in a desperate attempt to keep beating.

Eleven hours of cutting and patching and miraculous medicine later, the surgeon appears to tell us that Mulder has survived the surgery, although the next couple of days will be touch-and-go. I do not feel relieved. In fact, I feel nothing. I have not felt anything since the second I heard the bullet rip into my partner's body and knew that I

had let him down. I feel nothing when my mother hugs me and says, "This is good news, Dana. He's going to be okay." I feel nothing when Mulder's mother finally arrives and greets me with a heartbreaking look and a consoling squeeze of the hand.

I pick up my coat and walk out the door of the hospital. There is no reason left to stay.

I drive for I don't know how long, in no particular direction, toward no particular goal. The driving soothes me. The rumble of the car and the ribbon of the road lull me into a belief that I can turn back time. I say the word "gun" over and over again, rolling it in my mouth, concentrating on how the sounds are formed by the cooperation of teeth and lips and tongue. The way the hard "g" comes from deep in the throat, as if up from the very bowels of the soul. Then the lips and jaw open in a sort of forceful exhalation, ending with the tongue tapping on the roof of the mouth and a relaxing of the jaw as if to signal it is finished.

It is a hard word, harsh sounding, but if rolled off the lips properly, it has a certain softness. It is a simple word, and not nearly as dangerous sounding as the object it signifies. Gun. I get good at saying it. It is not difficult.

I say it here in the aching solitude of my car a dozen times, fifty times, a hundred times. Yet, I could not say it the one time it really mattered. When it comes right down to it, I was terrified. Not of the man, not of the gun, but of the fact that I saw him aim at Mulder, and I felt the potential loss that I was about to experience in a nightmarish shower of blood and bullets and terror. Getting too emotionally attached to your partner can be a death-knell for your efficiency as an agent. Despite my feelings for Mulder, in five years of partnering through the worst possible scenarios it has never been a problem. Until last night.

Last night, I panicked as I saw the gun point at him and I got slapped in the face with the realization of how much I cannot stand to lose him. I cannot lose him. Yet I wasn't able to prevent its possibility.

When I get back to my apartment hours later, my mother is waiting for me. When I see her sitting in my living room, I fear that she has come to end my life, to tell me what I cannot know and still continue to breathe.

"He's dead," I say, as if by saying it first I make it impossible to be true.

"No, no, Honey, he's okay," she immediately tries to reassure me. The sigh I have been holding for the last twenty-four hours seems to rush out of me with a force. But I still feel nothing. It is as if all of my insides have been ripped out of me, leaving only an empty body that moves and speaks and walks but feels absolutely nothing. An empty chest, bruised and bleeding, like Mulder's on that operating table. I wish for someone to massage my heart back into life again. I wish for a surgeon to ease the brooding ache that tells me I have

lost everything.

"He's not great, but he's holding his own," my mother continues.
"Dana, he's in and out of consciousness and he keeps asking for you.
You have to go to him. You have to be there. If you don't see him and
he dies, you will never forgive yourself."

"Don't even say that!" I hear my voice rising out of control, loud,
sharp, echoing through my empty chest and hollow soul. GUN!

"The doctors are being cautious. You have to face the possibility."

"He can't die, Mom. He just can't. Not like this. Not after all we've
been through. Not when it's my fault."

My mother takes my hand and sits with me; neither of us says a word.
She strokes my hair gently, just like my father used to do when I had
a bad dream. I wonder what it would take to make this disappear like
the monsters under the bed. "You made a mistake, Dana, but you can't
blame yourself. There's too much that can go wrong in those
situations. You are not to blame for that man's actions."

"But I am to blame for mine. It's so simple, Mom. All I had to do was
warn him. It was a routine arrest, a piddly Internet fraud case. I
mean, we've faced the wildest, most unimaginable threats, and I was
able to handle them no problem. But this one, this was just an
everyday thing for an agent. It's the type of case that Kersh has had
us on for the last few months. It was routine--no aliens, no powerful
conspirators with everything to lose, no paranormal supernatural
beings. Just a regular con man with a regular gun who freaked when
the FBI came calling. And I couldn't handle it."

"You're letting your feelings for him get in the way of your work,"
my mother suggests.

"No, Mom. That was never a problem before. I've always had feelings
for him."

"Your feelings have changed," my mother says practically.

Yes, they have. I know that is part of it. But that still doesn't
explain my inability to act on instinct, in the way that I have been
trained and born to the role of an agent. This was a simple arrest, a
by-the-book case. When did I lose my instinct? When did I reach the
point where my technique fails in the face of emotion?

"He doesn't blame you," my mother says softly. "I know Fox, and I
know he doesn't blame you. You have to forgive yourself." The words
slip right through the hollowness of my being. I hear nothing. I feel
nothing.

I have a hearing the next morning, just a formality to get the events
on record before memories change and facts blur. Agent Raines
testifies that he did not see a gun and that I had no clear shot
after he entered the room behind the suspect. Agent Monroe states
that he saw the gun just as the suspect fired and there was not time
to give a warning. They have, essentially, relieved me of any guilt.

Kersh glares at me like he's disappointed that he's lost his chance to get rid of half of his most infuriating team of agents. Skinner gives me a barely perceptible shake of the head to warn me not to incriminate myself. I do anyway. I tell the truth. I saw the gun, I did not give the warning. My partner was shot.

Despite my truth, the committee finds there is no cause for further inquiry, at least not until Mulder can give his version of events. Skinner neglects to mention my resignation, and I decide not to say anything for now. They order me to take a leave of absence because they interpret my perfunctory reticence as emotional strain due to my partner's fight for life. They do not understand that I do not feel anything. I go through the motions of my life, but my heart stopped beating right along with Mulder's on that operating table. Unlike Mulder's, it has not started again. I don't know if it ever will.
GUN!

"Are you Scully?" the nurse asks as I enter the room. I look at her curiously. "He's been calling for someone named Scully. I thought maybe that was you."

"It is," I answer.

"Well, I finally had to give him a sedative. He was getting so agitated. He won't wake up for hours probably. But it's good you're here. He was pretty frantic. He thought you'd been hurt."

I nod my understanding. The fact is that I am relieved that he is asleep.

"His mother just left to take care of some things. I guess she'll be back in the morning," the nurse continues, then leaves me alone with Mulder.

I approach the bed. He looks so pale, so alone. Although I have certainly been here before, monitoring a near-death Mulder, I have never seen him quite like this, surrounded by machines and swathed in bandages and wires. I wonder if this is how he saw me after I was abducted. If I looked like this. If I looked like I was dying.

Although the gnawing ache inside of me should bring tears of grief, I am unable to find release. I place my hand on Mulder's abdomen, below the wads of bandages that protect and hold together the stitched-closed incisions that allowed access to the deepest parts of him. I slowly run my hands along his belly, then down one leg, the blankets sheltering his skin from the touch of my hands. I run my hand all the way down to his foot, then under, then across to the other foot and back up again.

I concentrate on his strength, on the tightly toned muscles that signify his health. The whole time I think about healing, about putting back together the pieces of the broken man. When I reach his chest area, I lift my hands and float them just above the wounds without actually touching him, so I don't hurt him. I remember a dream I had once, I think when I was in the coma after my abduction. In my dream I saw my sister and Mulder standing side by side next to my bed, their hands hovering over my body searching for the energy

that Melissa insisted was there. The vision has stuck in my head since then, one of those dreams that seems more real than imaginary.

I hover my hands over the broken parts of Mulder, just like I remember him doing in my dream. I will my hands to heal. Although I am a pathologist, I want to believe that my calling to medicine means that I am blessed with the physician's healing touch. I imagine my hands as healing instruments, flowing and playing a mending tune over Mulder's body. They come to rest on his shoulder, follow his arm down to the tips of his fingers, then back up again. I urge healing from my hands into his body until I have touched every part of him that isn't bandaged, finishing with my fingers resting on his forehead where I send the will to live from what is left of my soul into my hands.

Then, I lower the bed rail and crawl into the bed next to him. I know it's not a good idea, but it comes to me as an urge which I cannot squelch, a need to use my presence and my touch to let him know how sorry I am and to ask his forgiveness. If my touch can help heal him, I will give it everything I have. I move close to him, careful to steer clear of his wounds, and lie on my side. I press my legs against his, my hip against his, and my face into his neck. I will lie here just for a minute. Just to let him know that I am here.

The monitor beeps with every beat of Mulder's heart, now patched and repaired, but, it seems, still strong and unconquerable. I let the rhythm of the machine hypnotize me into believing he will be okay. It is amazing how much power a simple machine holds over the destiny of people whom it does not monitor. The beeping of the machine keeps my own heart beating. It repeats a cadence that sticks in my head. Gun, gun, gun, gun, gun. Each beat reminds me of my own shortcomings.

"Don't you fucking die on me, Mulder." I take his hand and place it on my chest, over my heart, so he can feel it beating, so, perhaps, he will feel and understand what he needs to do. For the first time in two days I feel alive. And I would give everything I have to transfuse that life into Mulder.

I wake to a gradually conscious awareness of someone stroking my hair, gently, soothingly. I think maybe I have had a bad dream, and I remember how my father would sit with me and stroke my hair until I fell asleep, his rough hands caressing my hair so softly, in a way that made all the terrors disappear like puffs of smoke. As the realness of my adult life settles over me, the pieces of my present fall into place and I remember that this is no nightmare. With a start I realize where I am and that it must be Mulder who is stroking my hair.

I open my eyes to find Mulder conscious and, as I thought, stroking my hair and looking at me.

"Mulder?" I sit up and pull away so I can examine him. I am both relieved to see him awake and concerned that my presence will upset him.

"You're okay?" he asks in a raspy whisper, his chest heaving with the effort of speaking.

"Shhh, Mulder, don't try to talk. Don't talk. Just rest."

As usual, Mulder doesn't listen. "You're okay," he repeats. This time it is a statement and not a question. "I thought you were shot."

He closes his eyes and I see tears squeeze out over his lashes. One falls loose and swims down his cheek. I reach out and gently brush it away. His breathing immediately drops into a steady, slow rhythm and I realize he has fallen asleep again.

"I'm so sorry, Mulder," I say to his sleeping form. It is an apology I must make for myself even though I know he can't hear it. "I'm sorry I let this happen to you."

I leave sleeping Mulder to talk to the doctor, who seems to believe that Mulder is much improved and healing as well as can be expected. I leave the hospital with that hope hovering around me and manage to stay away for a day and a half. The more I think of Mulder healing, the more afraid I am to face him. I know that there is no reason to think that Mulder will be angry at me. He won't. It is my own guilt and self-doubt that I must conquer.

After a day and a half, I am unable to be alone any longer. My need to see Mulder is as strong as my desire to erase all the events of the last few days. I enter the room to find a much-recovered Mulder surrounded. My mother is sitting on one side of the bed holding his hand; his mother is sitting on the other side of the bed holding his other hand. Skinner is kicked back in a chair next to the bed. A burst of laughter rises from the group and Mulder groans with the physical pain and struggles not to laugh. I feel like I've walked into some movie of the week, with the family gathered around the recovering hero. In this scenario, I am the villain.

Mulder must see me out of the corner of his eye, for he turns suddenly to look at me.

"Scully!" he says, but it comes out in only the slightest whisper of surprise and a broad smile. Everyone turns to look at me. Mulder's eyes lock onto mine, and despite my apprehension, I am drawn toward him as if on a string that bridges the distance between us. I cannot resist that connection that has rustled between us since the first day we met. It draws me to the foot of his bed. He does not break the eye contact between us. Our mothers and Skinner excuse themselves in a hurry, as if on cue.

"Where have you been?" Mulder asks as soon as the last of them has left the room. "You were here when I woke up, and then the next time you were gone." Mulder's question is laced with concern, not accusation.

"I'm sorry, Mulder," I say, meaning much more than just for being gone. He lifts his arm and reaches his hand out to me. I step from the foot of the bed and come around to the side to occupy the chair Skinner has just vacated. I take his hand as he has requested by his gesture but then quickly release it.

We sit silently for a few moments, Mulder just looking at me in a way that makes my heart beat faster and my guilt bubble to the surface in a torrent. In my head, I compose and reject a dozen different apologies. I can't seem to match the words to what I am feeling.

"I heard you, Scully," Mulder says from out of the blue. I'm not sure what he's talking about.

"I didn't say anything, Mulder."

"Not just now. In the warehouse. I heard you. I heard you tell me he had a gun. I heard it, clear as day."

I look at him with affection for trying to protect me. "Mulder, I didn't say it. I know I didn't. Besides, both Agents Monroe and Raines were in the room. They were there, and they didn't hear me say anything."

"I know, Scully. Skinner filled me in. But I swear to you, I heard you say it." He is staring at me intently, with honesty, trying to convince me to believe him.

"That's impossible, Mulder." He looks at me as if I should have learned better by now. And maybe I should have.

"I heard it like you were standing right next to me and whispering in my ear. You whispered it to me. 'GUN!' Just like that."

I remember all the times I have felt inexplicably connected to Mulder. How we often communicate without words. How he came to me in a dream when it looked like he'd died in that boxcar and let me know he was alive. How, when I have been in the most danger, I have seen his face before me, reassuring me and giving me the strength I need to fight back.

And suddenly, although I cannot explain why or how, I believe Mulder heard me. I close my eyes with the realization of what has happened, and when I open them, he is grinning at me. "You believe me," he says as if he cannot fathom that possibility. I manage a weak smile of assent, although I know he already knows I believe.

He takes my hand again and rubs his thumb gently over my knuckles in a caress of reassurance. "I heard you, Scully. You didn't let me down. I trust you with my life. I always have." I squeeze his hand in return and feel the pressure that has been crushing me for the past few days lifted off of my body as if by a strong summer breeze. The ache inside me that has been pounding away at my soul begins to subside.

"Then why the hell didn't you duck, you idiot?" I cannot help the tears that spring to my eyes. What good is a warning if Mulder's too stubborn to listen?

Mulder laughs tightly, trying not to hurt himself. He looks at me, honesty shining in his eyes in a way that is both new to me and as old as the stars. He reaches over to brush away the tears that have fallen onto my cheeks. "If I had moved away, he would've shot you instead."

To stop the dizziness that enshrouds me, I lean over and lay my head against Mulder's shoulder, and he wraps his good arm around me. My heart beats inside my chest, loudly and with a power I have underestimated. I feel it in my limbs, my extremities, in every part of me. My chest feels swollen and full with it, a simple beat of life that marks so much time and so much togetherness.

"Gun," I lift my head to whisper into his ear, finally and freely and without hesitation.

"Yes," he replies, turning his face to plant a light kiss on my temple. "Exactly."

END _____

Feedback always appreciated: sbarringer@usa.net

All my fanfic is available on my webpage
<http://www.geocities.com/Area51/Dreamworld/2442>

End
file.